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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 000302

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/06/2018  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [EU](#) [KV](#) [SR](#) [RS](#)  
SUBJECT: GOR SPECIAL ENVOY'S OUTLOOK ON KOSOVO

REF: A. MOSCOW 235

[1](#)B. BELGRADE 142

Classified By: M/C for Political Affairs Alice G. Wells for reasons 1.4  
(b/d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. In a February 6 meeting, MFA Special Envoy for the Balkans Alexander Botsan-Kharchenko laid out the GOR's view of splits in the Serbian government, emphasizing that Russia believed the EUDP mission was illegal without UNSC approval, but that it did not object to Serbia's closer ties to the EU. He predicted that in the event of a CDI, Serbia would protest -- with GOR support -- in international fora and initiate a series of administrative and economic measures against Kosovo, but would not cut electricity supplies. Botsan-Kharchenko said that Russia's reaction would be only "political and diplomatic," and batted away press rumors of a GOR military response. The Russian presence in Kosovo after a CDI would depend on the Kosovar government's willingness to host a mission still attached to Belgrade, as well as to the security situation. Botsan-Kharchenko repeated that Russia would not "initiate" recognition of Abkhazia, but stressed that it will need to reexamine the situation after the "precedent" set by the CDI; separately, Moscow analysts predicted "semi-decisions" but no immediate recognition. The MFA believed the contact group was still a useful forum for the exchange of information, and hoped a meeting could be called in a few months after the "sharp backlash" subsided. End Summary.

#### Russia's Views on the Serbian Government Crisis

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[1](#)2. (C) In a February 6 meeting, Russian Envoy for Kosovo Alexander Botsan-Kharchenko highlighted the political split that had appeared between Tadic and Kostunica since the Serbian election and noted that "things are changing rapidly in Belgrade," but stopped short of predicting the collapse of the government. During their January 25 visit to Moscow (reftel A), Botsan-Kharchenko characterized Kostunica as very negative towards the deployment of the EUDP mission, with his support contingent on a new UNSC resolution premised on a "compromise" on the status of Kosovo.

[1](#)3. (C) Botsan-Kharchenko said he believed that Tadic's views towards an EUDP mission in general were more flexible, and noted the GOR supported Tadic's view that Serbia's European orientation would not detract from a strong relationship with Russia. In Moscow, Botsan-Kharchenko said Tadic backed Kostunica's position towards the EU because he needed Kostunica's support in the February 3 election, and perceived unity was critical. With election alliances past, the Serbian government was "close to splitting," and a decision by Tadic to sign the EU political agreement without Kostunica's support would shatter the coalition.

[1](#)4. (C) Bostan-Kharchenko told us that while in Moscow, Tadic hinted that he would agree to an EUDP if the EU were open to

continuing negotiations on Kosovo's final status, a position the GOR would also support. We stressed that the EUDP mission would ensure stability of the neighborhood, and that EU integration was important for Serbia and should not be tied to Kosovo's CDI. Botsan-Kharchenko emphasized that the GOR could not dictate to Serbia to unlink the two, and said that the GOR would continue to support Serbian opposition to the EUDP, reiterating that the EU had tried "in vain" to find a legal basis for the mission, and failed.

#### How Serbia Will React to a CDI

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¶5. (C) Botsan-Kharchenko claimed that the GOR was not aware of all of Belgrade's plans, but stressed that Belgrade did not want to create a humanitarian crisis in the region. That said, Botsan-Kharchenko outlined for us the likely elements of Serbia's response:

-- FM Jeremic confirmed to Lavrov in a January 24 meeting that Serbia would call for a Security Council meeting after a CDI to protest the violation of 1244 and call on UNSC members to pressure Pristina to withdraw the declaration. Russia will support this call.

-- Belgrade would likely block transportation routes and the administrative border.

-- Serbia would use the Berlin Mechanism in the OSCE to call an emergency meeting of the Permanent Council, where it would assert that Kosovo's CDI represents a threat to the Helsinki Final Act.

-- Jeremic also told Lavrov that Belgrade would take economic measures against Kosovo, but clarified that for technical

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reasons, Belgrade cannot stop electricity to Kosovo without also affecting Kosovar Serb areas and even areas of Southern Serbia, and was therefore very unlikely to do so.

¶6. (C) In its conversations with the GOR, Belgrade officials emphasized that they were not pushing the Kosovar Serbs towards taking an assertive position, Botsan-Kharchenko told us. We replied that actions on the ground belied these assertions, from the pressure placed on Kosovar Serbs not to participate in parliamentary elections to that applied on Kosovar Serb police not to cooperate with UNMIK. Botsan-Kharchenko argued that Kosovar Serbs held a hard line towards international organizations and would not cooperate with the incoming EUDP mission because they saw it as part of a CDI. With UNMIK, he said, there were two possibilities: either there would be no cooperation at all from the Kosovar Serbs, or they would maintain cooperation only with UNMIK contacts whose countries have not recognized Kosovo. We stressed that Belgrade could not hide behind Kosovar Serb rhetoric, but had to take responsibility for a peaceful transition that was essential to safeguarding the interests of Kosovo's minority communities.

#### How Russia Will React

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¶7. (C) Botsan-Kharchenko stressed that all measures Russia has prepared in response to a CDI were political and diplomatic, and ruled out press rumors that Russia would respond militarily to a CDI in Kosovo, including the possibility of setting up a Russian military base in Serbia.

¶8. (C) Russia's diplomatic representation in Pristina would depend on Kosovar willingness, Botsan-Kharchenko told us. Former Kosovar Prime Minister Ceku had assured the GOR that a Kosovar government would not demand Russia's withdrawal from Pristina after a CDI, but he was not sure what Thaci's decision would be. He noted that because the mission was

considered part of the embassy in Belgrade, the Kosovars may ask the Russians to leave. Botsan-Kharchenko pointed out that the security situation on the ground would contribute to the GOR's decision, and praised local and international authorities for their support to date.

#### Ambiguous Abkhazia

¶9. (C) Referring to Lavrov's January 23 press conference, Botsan-Kharchenko told us that Russia would not "automatically" recognize Abkhazia in response to a CDI, and the GOR wished to avoid the "challenges and risks" that recognition would bring. He stressed the GOR would not initiate recognition of Abkhazia, but a CDI from Kosovo would set a precedent, and the GOR would need to revisit the situation under those circumstances and in light of the actions of Abkhaz leadership.

¶10. (C) Separately, Moscow analysts told us that Russia was unlikely to recognize Abkhazia in the near future, for several reasons. Carnegie Center's Dmitry Trenin noted that he GOR has already de facto recognized Abkhazia, citing the proliferation of Russian passports in the region, relaxed border crossing rules, and the primacy of the Russian ruble in Abkhazia as evidence. He also noted that if it were the only country, or one of very few to recognize Abkhazia, Russian diplomacy would look "weak." Finally, Trenin argued that Russia was not looking for a fight with the U.S., which he viewed as a distinct possibility if Georgia declared war against Russia in response to its recognition of Abkhazia. The Institute of Euro-Atlantic Security's Alexander Nikitin added that he expected "semi-decisions" on frozen conflict regions, but that the GOR desire to protect territorial integrity was very real.

#### Have Your People Call My People: Hope for the Contact Group

¶11. (C) Botsan-Kharchenko told us that through a "fortunate misunderstanding," a Russian Embassy diplomat had passed a message to DAS DiCarlo that was interpreted as initiating a contact group meeting. While the GOR had no intention of initiating a meeting at this time, Botsan-Kharchenko told us that the MFA believes the contact group meeting may be a good mechanism to exchange information, "even with a deep divide." He suggested the contact group could meet "in a few months," after the "sharp backlash" subsides.

#### Comment

¶12. (C) In public, Botsan-Kharchenko has denounced the "blatant pressure" by the U.S. on the EU and UN to secure

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Kosovo's independence. In private, he is resigned to a CDI and pragmatic about the clash that will play out, as Russia and Serbia take every step possible to challenge the legality of Kosovo's independence. His purposeful ambiguity on Abkhazia reflects both the Russian efforts to keep the stakes high, and the reality that decisionmaking on this issue does not rest with the MFA.

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